

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

# Making It Work

Department of Education

PARTNERS IN PLANNING:

## Why Plan For the Future?

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As a student with a disability or the parent of a student with a disability, you may ask, "Why is there so much emphasis on transition planning for students with disabilities? Can't we just get through high school and trust that everything will work out okay?" The following statistics (some which may be startling) are offered to help illustrate the need to plan for the future.

Compared to their peers without disabilities, students with disabilities:

- Are less likely to receive a regular high school diploma;
- Drop out of school twice as often;
- Enroll in and complete post secondary education programs at half the rate; and
- Are employed at approximately one-third the rate.\*

If that's not enough to convince you of the importance of planning for the future, consider these results from the 2004 National Organization on Disability/Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities:

- Three times as many people with disabilities live in poverty, with annual household incomes below \$15,000;

- People with disabilities are twice as likely to have inadequate transportation; and
- More than twice as many people with disabilities go without needed health care.

So, is the picture all doom and gloom for a student with a disability? ABSOLUTELY NOT!! Those who begin early to plan for their future and connect with resources to help them along the way can most definitely be successful in life. Whether just beginning their high school career or nearing the end of it, the key for success lies in a good transition plan.

As you're beginning this new school year, take time to read this issue to refresh your memory on the topic of transition planning and maybe even learn a few new tips to get the year off to a good start. Don't be one of these statistics!

\*Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2000; National Council on Disability, 2003; National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, 2005.

A Student's Story

## Everything is Fine

In talking with others about Jon Tomasziewicz, there is no lack of praise for all he has accomplished. Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab) Specialist Kristin Janett says she has been more and more impressed with him over time, describing him as a calm and confident young man. His mother, Cheryl, speaks with pride about his knack for helping other students while he was in high school.

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Jon Tomasziewicz

## Everything is Fine . . . continued

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She notes that he was good at talking to other students at their level and never made fun of them if they needed help. Aline Jones, teacher at the Millard Young Adult Program, refers to the great strides Jon made in confidence, communication, and advocacy (for himself and others) while attending this program for 18 to 21 year olds.

This praise may not sound so remarkable until you hear that Jon has a learning disability with a speech and language impairment. As a result, Jon says that it takes him longer to learn than others. This also means that, while in school, he often had to ask questions for clarification and needed extra time and a quiet place to work on assignments and tests. His persistence obviously paid off, as he reports that he graduated from high school with honors.

With his father in the military, Jon transferred to Millard North High School from a school in Texas. He participated in the graduation ceremony for his class in 2004 and then transitioned into the Millard Young Adult (MYA) Program, completing that program in May of 2007. Jon's mother, Cheryl, worked with school programs for children with disabilities in Texas and she says that she was excited to find that, in her opinion, services in Nebraska were better than those in Texas. Having a hearing impairment herself, Cheryl has a keen appreciation for the importance of quality services.

While attending the MYA Program, Jon participated in a number of activities aimed toward employment.

This included completing job applications, participating in mock interviews, and developing a resume. As part of the program, he gained work experience through unpaid positions at numerous job sites in the community, including the Humane Society and Wal-Mart.

Vocational Rehabilitation staff also provided transition services and activities for Jon during his high school years. Jon recalls attending the Quality Employment Options training sessions offered by Voc Rehab at ESU #3.

At these sessions, he listened as employers talked about skills necessary for finding and keeping a job. He found that this gave him good information on employment opportunities and skills needed to get a job.

All of these experiences helped Jon as he began the search for a job. While in the Young Adult Program, a teacher suggested that he apply for a position at Long John Silver's.

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### Focus on Transition:

## Transition Requirements

You are likely aware that there is a federal law that requires schools to ensure that students with disabilities receive the education and services they need. This law, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), includes a number of requirements that relate to transition planning for high school students. In general terms, the requirements include the following:

- The student is to identify his or her strengths, needs, interests, and preferences for life after high school (including goals for further education, training, or employment).
- A plan is to be developed to assist the student in achieving his or her goals for life after high school.

- Educational services, supports, activities, accommodations, and modifications are to be provided to help the student be successful in school and to prepare for the world of work and community.
- The student, family, and school are to work in partnership with providers of higher education, employment training, and services for adults with disabilities to connect with needed services.

The law also includes other, more specific requirements. These few are highlighted here to illustrate some of the expectations for transition planning. An effective transition plan is one designed to lead the student to meeting his or her goals for attending college, training for employment, getting a job, living independently and participating in community life.

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# Student and Family Roles

It's important that students and their family members know and understand their role in creating and implementing an effective transition plan for a student's life after high school. This plan is not just a piece of paper filled out at a once-a-year meeting.

## During the IEP meeting:

- Speak up! You are the most important person at this meeting. Express your thoughts and feelings about your life now and what you want for the future.
- Ask questions if there are things that you don't understand.
- Be open to the suggestions and ideas of others.

- Be prepared to provide information about your son's or daughter's participation in home and community life. You know them best!
- Write down any information you want to be sure to share, questions you may have, or requests you wish to make.

## During the IEP meeting:

- Share the information you prepared. Provide support as your son or daughter shares their input.
- Listen to the input of others and ask questions when needed.
- Be an active part of developing the transition plan.

## After the IEP meeting:

- Check with your son or daughter to make sure the plan is being followed and is still working for him or her.
- Complete the activities or supports you agreed to provide as part of the plan.
- Communicate regularly with the teachers and/or case manager to be sure the plan is still on track.

There is a lot of work that must take place before, during, and after the IEP meeting. Let's look at what the student and family members can do to get the most out of the process.

## The Student

### Before the IEP meeting:

- Make sure you understand what is supposed to happen during the meeting. Who would you like to invite to attend?
- Think about your interests and what you see yourself doing both during and after high school.
- Decide what you want to discuss with your team (you may wish to write this down or have someone assist you with this).

## After the IEP meeting:

- Continue to talk with others and think about your plans for the future.
- Do what you agreed to do as best you can.
- Let someone know if something isn't working for you or if your plans change.

## The Family

### Before the IEP meeting:

- Talk with your son or daughter about what he/she wants from the meeting and help determine who should be invited.

A final note: **STUDENTS WILL CHANGE THEIR MINDS.** Even with the most careful planning, it is perfectly natural for students to change their minds regarding where they want to live, further education, or career plans. This is to be expected. View this as a time of learning, exploration, and decision making. *Hang in there!*

## A Student's Story

# *Everything is Fine* . . . continued

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He filled out an application and interviewed on the same day. The very next day, he was on the job! The rest is history, as Jon will soon observe his three-year anniversary with the restaurant.

When asked if he had advice for other high school students, he shared that he feels the key to success is pretty simple. He says, "I wasn't the class clown. If you pay

attention in class and get along with your teachers, everything will be fine." This must have worked for Jon, as it certainly appears that everything is fine with him.

### **For More Information:**

Contact the State Vocational Rehabilitation Office in Lincoln at **1-402-471-3644** or toll free at **1-877-637-3422**.

You may obtain information on the Voc Rehab Service Office in your area by calling these numbers or accessing the Service Office listing on the web at: <http://www.vocrehab.state.ne.us/vr/office.html>

Jon has learned many new skills on the job. He started out as a cook, moved to a cashier position that involved meeting and greeting the customers, and has now advanced to being a team leader. His current responsibilities include providing training to new employees, as well as completing the many steps involved in opening and closing the restaurant.

What's next for Jon? He has a learner's permit and, with the assistance of his mother, is working toward getting his driver's license. He wants to utilize his love for technology and says he would like to get a job at Best Buy. He's also considering taking classes to become a graphic designer for video games. He eventually plans to move out of his family home and hopes to get an apartment with a friend.

### About this Publication

This publication, produced by Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation, is intended for students with disabilities and their families. The next issue, Volume #25, is scheduled for distribution in December, 2007.

Please contact us if you:

- Would like additional copies of this publication.
- Have questions or would like more details about any of the information contained in this issue.
- Have a success story you'd like to share with us.
- Have suggestions for topics for future issues.
- Wish to be removed from the mailing list for this publication.

To view previous issues of this or other Vocational Rehabilitation publications, or to receive a free subscription to these publications, go to: <http://www.vocrehab.state.ne.us/vr/newsstand.htm>. You may also contact the Vocational Rehabilitation State Office toll free at 1-877-NE-REHAB (1-877-637-3422) to receive these publications.

### Additional Resources

If you have questions or concerns about services from Vocational Rehabilitation or are looking for additional disability resources, contact the Hotline for Disability Services/Client Assistance Program at 1-800-742-7594 or in Lincoln at 402-471-0801 or e-mail [victoria.rasmussen@cap.ne.gov](mailto:victoria.rasmussen@cap.ne.gov)

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